

## Lives on the Line: Listening to Voices from the Borderlands (Part 1)

Kimberly Kim, is an upper school English Teacher and debate coach at St. Margaret's Episcopal School. She received her B.A. and M.A. in English Literature at James Madison University. She also has a M.A.T. in English secondary education from JMU. Kimberly has been teaching high school English for the past 15 years in a variety of school types and settings. Constantly tweaking and adjusting curriculum to meet the needs of her students, a single year is never the same in Kimberly's English class. There are, however, fundamental educational principles that guide the overall focus of her course. These principles are:

- Model and encourage empathy
- Practice kindness and respect
- Empower students to use their voice
- Engage deeply with the content
- Value the power of skilled and mindful listening
- Challenge students to push their limits
- Teach students a variety of ways to practice
- Give them multiple opportunities for trial and error
- Encourage risk-taking
- Cherish creativity, curiosity, and fun!

Kimberly is also a firm believer in giving students agency to learn and tell their own stories. She works to develop curriculum that enables students to have salient and powerful experiences with the vibrant world around them. She also believes that teaching, much like painting, composing music, or choreographing a dance, is an Art. This lesson is designed to allow any educator to make it their own. Thus, she wholeheartedly invites and encourages this audience to make whatever modifications or changes that would best serve the needs and interests of their own classrooms and school communities.

**Subject Area:** Language Arts or History

**Keywords:** border, borderlands, narrative, legislation, storytelling, monologues, poetry, migrant, immigration, identity, native american, stories, storytelling



**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Time Required to Complete:** 120 minutes

**Instructional Objectives and Student Learning:**

- Students will read and discuss stories from a variety of people groups in the borderlands.
- Students will make inferences about what they read in those stories.
- Students will synthesize either a poem or monologue based on their reading.
- Students will work in groups to share what they learned from the reading.
- Students will work in one group to share what they learned through discussion of the reading in another group.
- Students will take time to reflect on what they learned from the reading.
- Students will discuss the material as a whole class to help them further process their experience with the text.

California Common Core Standards for English Language Arts

**Key Ideas and Details:**

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1](#)

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2](#)

Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3](#)

Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

**Craft and Structure:**

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.4](#)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.5](#)

Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6](#)

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

**Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:**

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7](#)

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:**

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.10](#)

By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 11-CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

**Guiding Questions:**

1. Who lives in the borderlands?
2. Who is affected by the border?
3. What do people who live at the border think about policy that is made about them?
4. Why are migrants willing to face such extreme hardship to come to this country?
5. How do different identities intersect at the border?
6. How is the government working to deal with problems at the border?
7. What is the power of poetry to express the feelings of a person?
8. Why are the stories of the borderlands important to all people in the Americas?

**Materials and Resources**

The following activity can be done either electronically on a device or on paper.

1. Copies of the readings
2. Pen or pencil
3. Paper

**Introduction**

The packet of enclosed narratives contains a variety of different perspectives on the issues of immigration and border security. A weaker lesson would be one where the teacher provided narratives that are representative of only one side of the debate.

Therefore, it is strongly encouraged that you provide your students with multiple

perspectives to allow them, as future thinking and educated voters, to listen and decide for themselves what to think. This is not a persuasion piece, rather, it is a lesson designed to help students realize the deeper complexities that exist in any debate.

I have selected (for your convenience) several stories each from groups who are deeply involved with the borderlands. Those groups are: Border Patrol Agents, Legislators, Migrants, Native Americans, and General Residents of Border Towns. If you wish to add more variety, you can look at narratives from the vigilante Minuteman Project (<https://baesic.net/minutemanproject/>) and activist groups such as No More Deaths (<http://forms.nomoredeaths.org/en/>) or Humane Borders (<https://humaneborders.org/>). These groups are on the more extreme ends of the debate and have done things that have pushed and even violated the law, thus I chose not to include them. However, they do play a role in the overall debate and would merit a lesson on its own about civilian activism.

The following lesson is designed to help students identify and understand difference in identity, culture, and perspective via the primary narratives of people from a region that is full of a complex and rich history. The land where the U.S. meets Mexico is a meeting place of several cultures. It is a place where differences and similarities become unavoidable and tangible realities. For students, particularly students from the U.S., it provides an opportunity for them to gain a sense of their place in the international community, and even more, help them understand that they are not alone.

My hope in this lesson is that students gain an understanding and empathy for people outside of their own world. Additionally, I hope to use the power of storytelling to bridge the socially manufactured divides of race, economics, ability, and gender. It's important that students have time to reflect on their experiences with the primary text. If you have the time, it would be beneficial to add a reflection activity (such as guided discussion questions) for groups as they discuss, or build in time to float around from group to group to prompt students to go deeper in their engagement with the text.

### **Instructional and Lesson Activities**

1. Take time to go over essential questions with students. What do they know about the border? Who lives there? Why are their stories important?
2. Invite students to reserve judgement in the reading of their narratives. Practice a few techniques of mindful listening before beginning the activity
3. Divide students into groups of 3-4. They will be participating in a jigsaw grouping activity to read and discuss the material. The following procedures will guide you through this type of group activity.
4. Each group of students will be given a set of primary narratives. Thus one group will have four different Border Patrol narratives, another will have four different

Migrant narratives, another will have four different legislators speaking on this issue, and so on, and so forth. Within each group, each student should chose one narrative to read. They will become the “experts” about the type of people group they read.

5. As students read, they should be encouraged to annotate important passages in the margins.
6. Each individual student will create a found poem with their individual stories to share with their initial group.

Found poems take existing texts and refashion them, reorder them, and present them as poems. The literary equivalent of a collage, found poetry is often made from newspaper articles, street signs, graffiti, speeches, letters, or even other poems. In this case, the students will be using the text they have been assigned and ONLY that text to build their poem.

**Sample Poem taken from Mario’s narrative: Mario**

Born  
in Honduras  
Friends and family  
Very normal.  
A very special person,  
My grandmother,  
Playing guitar and singing.  
One day,  
Worst news  
Extortionists  
See us  
Asked big.  
I don’t want to  
Go back.  
I am afraid  
Miami  
Was not easy,  
Was strange.  
News that hurt  
Grandmother died  
Funeral by video.  
Looking to the future  
In my country

In my country  
My favorite country

7. Within their groups, students will discuss what they read individually and share their poems.

#### Sample Discussion Questions

1. What words and phrases did you find repeated throughout the text?
2. What seemed really important to the speaker?
3. What surprised you about this narrative?
4. In what ways does this story show that your person is a human being? Where do you see flaws? Emotions? feelings?

8. Once students have had time to discuss and share their poems, reorganize the groups. In the new grouping, there should be one student each representing a different type of narrative. Whereas previously each group contained only one type of narrative, the second grouping will have a variety of narrative types. For instance, each group should have one border patrol, one legislator, one migrant, and one native american person.
9. After rearranging in their new groups, students will have a discussion about what they learned about their person from their narrative. Here are a few discussion questions that you can use to help facilitate going deeper:

#### Discussion Questions

1. What stood out to you about the reading?
2. Did the narrative you read challenge any preconceived ideas you had about that type of person?
3. Did the narrative affirm any preconceived notions?
4. What feelings or emotions did you experience while reading the piece?
5. In what ways can you relate to your person?
6. Are there any common themes between the narratives in your group?
7. What differences did you notice?
8. Discuss why you think those differences or similarities exist?

9. What do the narratives say about life on the border?

10. As a group, the students will collaboratively write a new poem combining lines from their individual found poems. The new poem must incorporate two lines from each group member's first poem and the group must collaboratively compose at least two lines to tie the whole thing together.
11. Read each group's new poem aloud to the class.
12. As a class, have a discussion about the things students learned in the activity. What differences did they see between the different poems? What similar themes? How could this inform the problem of multiple and sometimes contrasting narratives that exist about the borderlands?

### **Extend/Elaborate: Additional Learning**

This lesson could be adapted to be a Document-Based Question (DBQ) in preparation for an AP History exam or used to build a synthesis essay for an AP Language and Literature course.

You could also use these narratives to do a classroom debate on this issue.

### **Evaluation**

The following will be assessed in this lesson:

- Student annotations of the reading (optional)
- Personal found poem written by the individual student
- Group found poem written by the final group (after groups are redistributed)

### **Annotations**

Annotations can serve a variety of purposes, however, I prefer to use them as a means of making thinking visible while a student is reading. Thus, I train students to make note of the following:

- Clarifying questions for stronger comprehension
- Questions that attempt to find deeper meaning that look at such concepts as power, gender, social class, and stylistic choices made by the author.
- Definitions of unknown words.
- An attempt to understand the deeper meaning of figurative language.

### **Grading Poetry**

Evaluating poetry can be difficult. I usually have a minimum number of lines that students need to write. Between 10-15 lines is usually a nice size.

#### Poem 1: Individual poem

Since this is a found poem, I will grade based on how well the poet represented the primary text. If the student misrepresented the text due to a weak reading, they receive a lower grade. Additionally, I would score a poem higher if the student managed to manipulate word order or syntax to improve the overall flow of the piece. Creative elements such as repetition, pun, juxtaposition of ideas, use of irony, and paradox are also encouraged and looked for in evaluation.

#### Poem 2: Group poem

For this assignment, the assembled lines of poetry have to come together in a coherent fashion. I allow students to add words if necessary to facilitate better flow in the overall poem.

Generally, I did not include very tight guidelines or expectations for the group poem vs. the individual poem because the group poem is more about getting students to engage with the ideas of mixed narratives. This is inherently a very difficult task for students to process and then synthesis an analysis of their discussion, so I focus more of the grading on the individual activity.

### **Accommodations and modifications**

This lesson relies on two groupings, so if you do not have time to complete it all in one day, you will have to accommodate for the fact that some students will be absent for the second grouping. If this happens, then you can either just continue doing the lesson minus one or two voices, or you can collect all poems at the end of one day so that you can still provide the absent students' poem for the final even if they are not present.

If you have a reader that needs additional time, you can shorten the selection or pick a reading for them. The ones I provided are of varying difficulties and lengths. You also could pre-assign the reading so that students have ample time to complete the reading.

For students who wish to have more of a challenge, you can have them find their own narratives and run this as a research project.

### **Additional Resources**

This lesson can also be done with novels. Here are some suggestions:

1. *The Book of Unknown Americans* by Cristina Henriquez
2. *The Fabulous Sinkhole* by Jesus Salvador Trevino
3. *The Death of Josseline: Immigration Stories from the Arizona Borderlands* by Margaret Regan

## References

Catapano, Jordan. "The Jigsaw Method Teaching Strategy." Teachhub.com <<https://www.teachhub.com/jigsaw-method-teaching-strategy>>. Accessed on 7/23/19.

Poets.org. "Found Poem: Poetic Form." Poets.org. <<https://poets.org/text/found-poem-poetic-form>>. Posted 9/13/04. Accessed 7/23/19.

## Lives on the Line: Expressing Voices from the Borderlands (Part 2)

**Time Required to Complete:** 2 weeks

### Instructional Objectives and Student Learning:

- Students will present the ideas and perspectives they gained from reading primary sources.
- Students will think of different and diverse ways to present ideas to a wider audience.
- Students will present their work in efforts to develop empathy in their peers.
- Students will work collaboratively to create a performance piece for their learning community.
- Students will put thought toward audience and purpose when presenting their ideas.

California Common Core Standards for English Language Arts

### Key Ideas and Details:

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2](#)

Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.3](#)

Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

### Craft and Structure:

#### [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.4](#)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text,

including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.5](#)

Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.6](#)

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

**Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:**

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7](#)

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**Guiding Questions:**

1. How can I express the sentiments of people in the borderlands in a manner that is meaningful to myself?
2. How can I do so in a manner that is meaningful to the people in my school community?
3. In what ways can I best utilize my talents and knowledge to express my experience with borderland voices?
4. What do I wish people to know about the borderlands from my performance?
5. Why is it important to share the stories of the borderlands to people in the United States?

**Materials and Resources**

The following activity can be done either electronically on a device or on paper.

1. Copies of the readings
2. Pen or pencil
3. Paper
4. OPTIONAL: internet connection and screen to show students samples from youtube.
5. OPTIONAL: A simple instrument for background such as a musical triangle, a light bell, a tambourine, or a hand drum

## Introduction

The act of creating in itself is an important part of an individual's mental and spiritual growth. However, the ultimate purpose for creation is to speak to an audience. By having students perform their creations, they not only share a vital resource with their community, but they also get the opportunity to experience the concepts of audience, purpose, and occasion all at once.

This lesson is designed to help students understand the power of storytelling through performance. Students will work in groups to develop a performance of their found poetry based on the narratives of people from the borderlands. In this lesson, students will put thought into different ways one can express language. Ideally, they will think of ways to position their bodies, utilize their positions on the floor space, think about volume dynamics, and the power of coordinated dance to express the meaning of each word in their found poem.

This activity does require students to work a little outside of their comfort zones. Like any exercise routine, you only get out of it as much as you are willing to invest. It helps to provide examples to students via modeling. I will sometimes do these kinds of activities together with the Drama teacher and drama students because they are well accustomed to doing these types of exercises and can better help guide your students towards developing a stronger awareness of space and their bodies.

## Instructional and Lesson Activities

1. It would be best to begin the class with an icebreaker to help loosen the students up. Ideally, pick something that gets them moving their bodies. Most of the time, I will do some quick 3 minute Tai Chi exercises. You can find a lot of them on youtube. Here are some possible activities: 37 Fun Drama Games and Activities (<https://www.kidactivities.net/drama-games-and-activities/>)
2. Break the students up into their second groups from the previous lesson. Each group should have a found poem containing different voices from the borderlands that they composed the other day.
3. Students may add their own lines and phrases to their found poems as much as they wish as long as they keep the elements from the primary sources they gathered from the previous day. This will help to augment the performance elements and give them an opportunity to practice more creativity in their performance.
4. Students are to work collaboratively in their groups to choreograph a performance of their poem. In addition to modeling myself some ways to utilize volume, body movement, and tone in performance, I will also show them some examples from youth poetry slams on youtube.com. Links are listed below in Additional Resources. See the Assignment Sheet for more details.

5. I usually give them a week to compose and practice their performances. It would be beneficial to meet with a group once or twice during the process and give them helpful feedback on their performance. Student groups tend to lack an awareness of audience that begs the input of an outside perspective.
6. Then I reserve a theater space in the school auditorium for them to perform their pieces. Students may perform their pieces exclusively for the class or for the wider school community. I have also filmed these performances and presented them to wider communities.
7. After all performances are completed, the class will have a debriefing conversation.

#### Possible Debriefing Questions:

1. What did you learn in your own groups about the poem through performance?
2. What did you learn from other groups by watching their performance?
3. What stood out to you in each of the performances?
4. If you could do your performance over again, what would you add or take away?

#### **Extend/Elaborate: Additional Learning**

As mentioned before, this lesson could be done in collaboration with the drama department.

For the sake of time, I went with poetry for this lesson. However, you can also do this with larger sections of text from the primary sources and develop entire monologue for students to perform on stage and with costumes. Monologues would be a powerful way to present these narratives, but they will also take a significantly longer amount of time to perform.

You can also collaborate with an Art or Graphic Design teacher to have the students create an 2-D or 3-D Art piece based on their poem. One idea would be to have them make a giant chalk tableau with sidewalk chalk. There are a number of beautiful murals in El Paso expressing various viewpoints on this issue. Students can use these murals for inspiration.

#### **Evaluation**

The students will be evaluated on their performance of the poem.

- Were they coordinated in their movements?

- Did they take into account the movements of their entire body?
- Did they consider the space they are standing on?
- Was there thought put into vocal dynamics or sound effects?
- Did they memorize the poem?
- Did they put thought into things said individual vs. in unison?
- Did they incorporate sounds other than language (e.g., clapping, stomping, clicks, and whistles).

### **Accommodations and modifications**

Some students may not be physically able to perform full body movements. In such cases, I will reward a group that works to accommodate for a single member's physical disability.

Even though students who suffer from stage anxiety have an easier time working together in a group, it may be the case that their anxiety will not enable them to perform for a wider audience. In such cases, I will enable them to do a private performance for me or a video performance that only I, as the teacher, will watch.

### **Additional Resources**

Here are some links to performances:

- 2013 - Brave New Voices (Finals) - Washington D.C. Team Round #4  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXk3uhlhAVY>
- NPS 2016 Group Piece Finals (Houston Poetry Slam)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNZjuNeaGxQ>
- 2015 - Brave New Voices (Finals) - "Emmett" by Philadelphia Team  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrizMMiBbBY>
- "Somewhere in America" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OadZpUJv8Eg>
- Lincoln High Slam Poets [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X\\_vl1NwFaLk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_vl1NwFaLk)
- Lincoln Middle School Students  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmDutxMZrWw>

### **Reflection**

Audience is a powerful motivator. I've done similar projects in the past with my students and the knowledge that others will see and experience their creations will often times drive them to work hard to create quality work. My role is as practice audience and friendly critic. I will frequently give specific feedback and encourage them to do several

rehearsals. It's best to give more feedback early and frequently in the project and then back off later. The feedback is also helpful in getting them motivated for the project.

I didn't feel the need to include an assignment sheet for the found poem because they generally don't need a lot of detailed instructions. This assignment, however, given the time it takes for them to complete and the stakes of the assignment